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# Chirac's Counterterrorism Policy After Six Months

## Summary

French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac inherited from his Socialist predecessors their twin priorities for French counterterrorism policy-- to forestall terrorist actions in France and to obtain the release of French hostages in Lebanon. To these ends, the Chirac government has toughened police operations at home and conciliated terrorist groups and state sponsors abroad. Most notably, the French have offered concessions to Syria and Iran to discourage or prevent LARF bombings, to dissuade Lebanese Shia from attacking French troops in UNIFIL, and to convince Hizballah to release at least some French hostages. These maneuvers appear to have bought a lull in the bombing campaign that rocked France at the end of the summer, thereby boosting public approval of both Chirac and President Mitterrand.

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Not only did Chirac survive the crisis of LARF bombings in good political shape, he seized the opportunity to gain ground in his tussle for power with Mitterrand, gathering the reins of counterterrorist policy into his own hands. He and Mitterrand have been forced into an uneasy truce by public expectations of unity and by mutual intimidation. Although Mitterrand has been marginalized from counterterrorist policy to a significant extent, he retains at least a de facto veto over some policies because he can threaten to make a

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\*This memorandum was prepared [redacted] with assistance from [redacted] Office of European Analysis. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to [redacted] Chief, Western Europe Division, Office of European Analysis, [redacted]

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public issue of them. [REDACTED]

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On the basis of accumulating evidence, we believe that Chirac has made major progress toward accommodation with both Damascus and Tehran--through financial incentives, promised arms sales, and warmer diplomatic relations. We believe Chirac has also arranged a truce directly with members of the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF) in Lebanon, based on assurances of the eventual release of LARF leader Georges Abdallah. Through these agreements, Chirac has a good chance of achieving many of his counterterrorist objectives over the next few months. [REDACTED]

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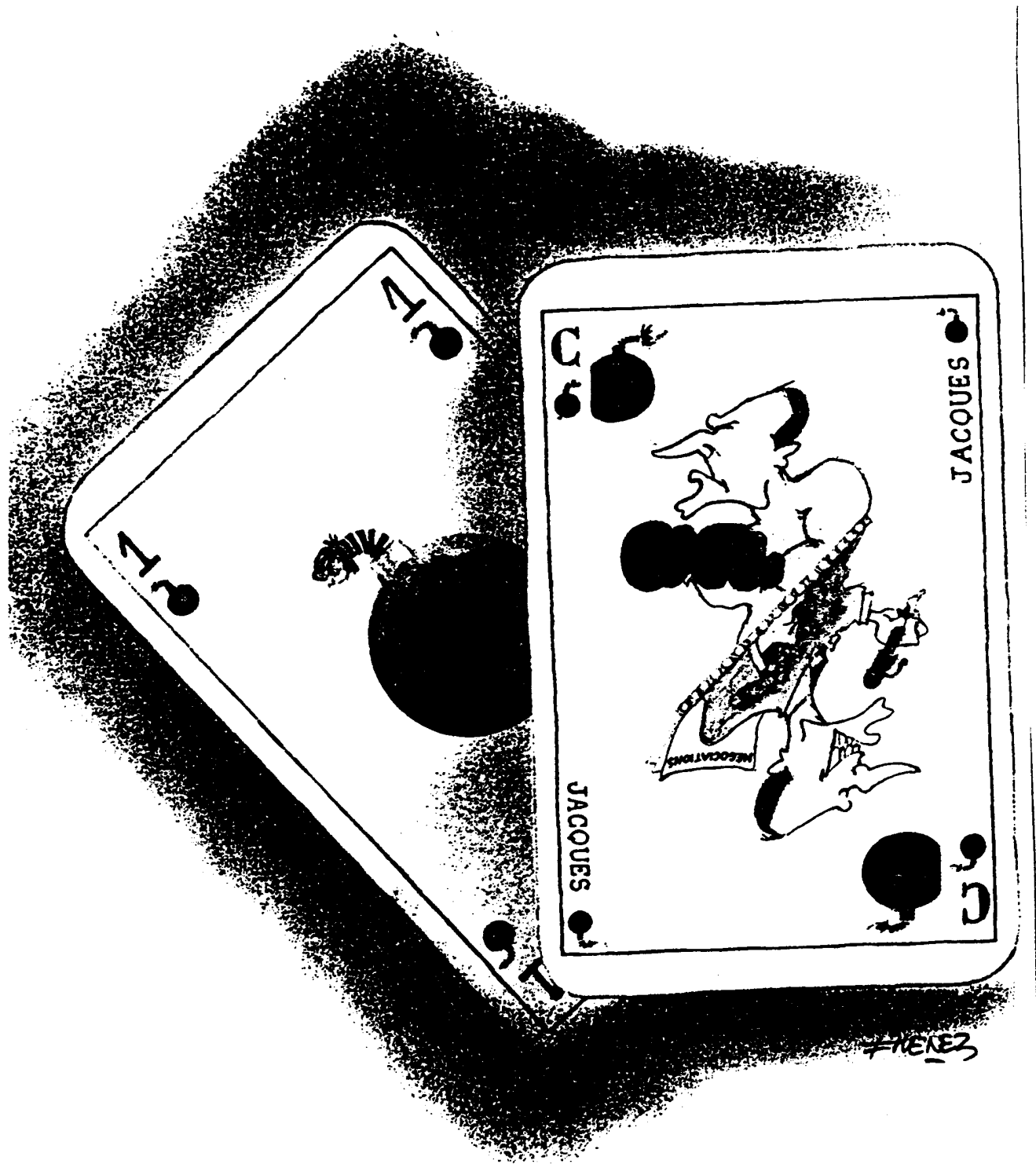
Two wildcards could spoil Chirac's hand, however. First, there is little evidence that Syria and Iran will be able to force Hizballah into a deal on the release of more hostages while Kuwait ignores Hizballah's demand for release of Da'wa prisoners. Second, Syrian and Iranian sponsorship of international terrorism could become so blatant as to force Chirac to retreat in embarrassment from his policy of accommodation. [REDACTED]

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The US stake in the success or failure of Chirac's efforts is significant. A complete breakdown of Chirac's policy--especially if it involved more kidnaping of Frenchmen and terrorist demands--would discredit further accommodation. On the other hand, if Chirac achieves at least some of his narrow objectives, as we believe is likely, this may further diminish French determination to oppose Syrian and Islamic fundamentalist domination of Lebanon. It may also contribute to the prestige of Islamic radicals in the Middle East whose objectives are contrary to the interests of both moderate Arabs and the United States. [REDACTED]

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### Counterterrorism: From Rhetoric to "Realism"

The government of Prime Minister Chirac came to power last March amid feverish efforts by its predecessor to secure the release of French hostages in Lebanon. The hardfought election campaign that gave Chirac a thin majority in the National Assembly focused in large part on [redacted] Mitterrand's counterterrorism policies. Chirac insisted that his government would be made of sterner stuff, and his first speech before the new National Assembly announced a package of anti-terrorist measures in line with his campaign promises. [redacted]

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Now that Chirac has been in power for six months, however, it is clear that his approach to counterterrorism, like that of his Socialist predecessors, is fixed on two imperatives--precluding terrorism at home and securing the release of hostages abroad. In tackling terrorism of Middle Eastern origin, Chirac has adopted the previous government's methods, combining public toughness with private negotiations. Indeed, Chirac has intensified both efforts, partly because his own frenetic style demands it, and partly because terrorist bombings and approaching presidential elections put a premium on action. [redacted]

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### "Terrorising Terrorists"

Chirac's early blueprint for counterterrorism policy featured greater emphasis on international cooperation: ratification of international agreements on counterterrorism and extradition, revision of the Vienna Convention to allow closer scrutiny of diplomats, [redacted] Chirac and his allies also promised to make terrorism a separate crime, to establish special magistrates and courts to handle such crimes, [redacted] and to strengthen police activities. [redacted]

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Thus far Chirac's record on counterterrorism at home is mixed. However sincere Chirac's campaign promises, it is clear that many of these goals were dropped or scaled down after his government assumed power. On some--notably [redacted] the criminality of terrorism--the government backtracked completely. Until recently, "international cooperation" has consisted primarily of repeating familiar platitudes about the government's firmness. [redacted]

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Chirac, however, has now moved on both multinational and bilateral fronts: [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

-- Chirac's government also announced last week that it will ratify a Council of Europe treaty that facilitates the extradition of suspected terrorists. The accord disallows "political motives" as grounds for refusing extradition in terrorism cases. [REDACTED]

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Chirac's policies at home, meanwhile, have achieved an aura of toughness, largely because he and senior law enforcement officials are adept at talking a good line about "terrorizing terrorists." The police have also risked public criticism by acting aggressively against "suspicious types," and their policy has apparently won majority acceptance. To highlight the government's priorities, Chirac has created an interministerial commission on terrorism--an assembly of top ministers who formulate recommendations on counterterrorism. [REDACTED]

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At the street level, Interior Minister Pasqua and Security Minister Pandraud have used new legislation and enhanced police powers to intimidate and expel suspected terrorists. In April, for example, police kicked down the doors of a leftist newspaper to question two of its journalists about alleged contacts with terrorists. Police also have multiplied spot identity checks and scrutinized hotel registrations more closely. Armed with legislation streamlining expulsions of illegal aliens, Pandraud and Pasqua have ousted over 1,700 illegal immigrants, a few of whom were apparently terrorist sympathizers. One such roundup was aimed at Lebanese with possible links to the Abdallah clan; some of the other mass arrests were also designed to disrupt terrorist support networks. [REDACTED]

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Pandraud's police have also had some success against the domestic, anti-NATO terrorists of Action Directe, arresting several AD members and publicly harassing AD's intellectual guru, Frederic Oriach. The presence of police on the streets and harassment of suspicious persons accelerated even further during the September bombings. This, together with new visa controls and reinforced detachments of frontier police, has by all accounts impressed and pleased the public.\* [REDACTED]

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Leftist and human rights groups have vowed to organize protests against some of Pandraud's measures, but they have found little public support. Indeed, judging by the strength of the French public's reaction to the recent wave of bombings, we believe voters would probably back even more vigorous efforts. Chirac is therefore unlikely to ease pressure on terrorist cells and may even intensify some efforts. "Air Pasqua" has been so popular that Paris is likely to continue or even increase expulsions of illegal immigrants, for example, both because doing so steals the thunder of the extreme right and because the government is spared the trouble of proving suspicions of terrorist links. [REDACTED]

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#### Accommodation Abroad

While pursuing a tough counterterrorist image at home, the Chirac government has adopted and substantially expanded the French tradition of negotiating truces with foreign terrorists and broader agreements with the countries that sponsor them. Chirac's immediate objectives have been to stop the bombing campaigns in France and to bring the French hostages home, but we believe he also has more long-range goals. Despite his reputation for being a staunch supporter of Iraq, Chirac apparently shares Mitterrand's perception that it is in France's long-term interest to cultivate better relations with Iran and Syria, which are likely to be dominant powers in the Middle East in the years ahead. This policy's most notable success has been the improvement of relations with Iran and the release of four hostages. [REDACTED]

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Shortly after taking office, the Chirac government announced its intention to follow through on efforts begun by the Socialists to normalize relations with Tehran. In May, French and Iranian officials apparently reached agreement in principle to settle their outstanding financial differences. Controversy

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\*Some rightists still claim, however, that Chirac continues to softpedal domestic terrorism and that police are hamstrung by politicians from expelling known terrorists and from effectively intimidating those who support them. The self-styled French Liberation Front--a clandestine group that is widely suspected to be composed of former and perhaps present security officers--has published names, dates, and places to back up its assertions of softness. It has issued three communiques to date, each of which has leaked documents that officials reportedly found very embarrassing. [REDACTED]

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had centered on the repayment by France of \$1 billion invested by the late Shah in Eurodif--a French-led nuclear reprocessing consortium--and on the payment by Iran of claims lodged by French companies when contracts were cancelled following the Shah's ouster. [redacted] Paris and Tehran also dickered over other Iranian demands, including the h expulsion of Iranian dissidents in France and the establishment of an evenhanded arms sales relationship. Public moves began soon after Chirac took office:

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- Paris expelled Iranian dissident leader Rajavi from France in June; soon afterward, two French hostages were released in Lebanon.
- French Foreign Minister Raimond asserted publicly, however, that normalization, including a financial settlement, depended on guarantees for the release of the other French hostages held in Lebanon.\*
- Last week, on the heels of the release of two French hostages, French Foreign Minister Raimond announced a financial settlement, without mentioning the release of additional hostages. [redacted]

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Although there is no evidence yet that Iran has guaranteed the release of more French hostages, Paris probably believes that Tehran can and will exert sufficient influence with Hizballah to obtain the freedom of at least some. Diplomatic contacts are likely to continue, and if no hostages are released soon, Paris may try to increase its leverage by withholding payment on the Eurodif money, blocking arms sales, and stonewalling on an exchange of ambassadors. [redacted]

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In an effort to cover all bases, Chirac has also recently choreographed an elaborate "ballet of emissaries" with Damascus which apparently succeeded in obtainingc Syrian help to curb LARF terrorism in France and secure the above-mentioned release in

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\*The protocol, signed in late-October, only required France to make a \$330-million payment within two days and apparently left all other details of a financial settlement to further negotiations. We believe the further negotiations probably will also include discussion of further arms sales and especially provisions to permit remaining French payments in goods and services, rather than cash. [redacted]

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mid-November of two Frenchmen held by Hizballah. After receiving numerous Syrian emissaries--including Vice President Khaddam--Chirac has dispatched Cooperation Minister Aurillac, Internal Security Director Gerard, and a number of lesser officials to Syria and Lebanon over the past two months to enhance collaboration with Damascus. Although publicly the Chirac team has criticized previous governments for using unofficial emissaries, Chirac reportedly has also sent several private envoys to talk with Syrian President Assad. [redacted]

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According to press reports, Aurillac and others offered Syria substantial financial aid and a generous trade package. [redacted]

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[redacted]

On the economic front, Paris may also have offered Damascus a heavily subsidized shipment of wheat in October as part of an EC arrangement. Reports of new arms sales have also filled the press, although Paris announced last week it had rejected a proposal to sell French tanks to Damascus. Other sales--for armoring material, sophisticated air defense equipment, and Gazelle helicopters--may be in the offing. [redacted]

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French spokesmen, meanwhile, are sticking to the goal of closer cooperation with Syria despite the Hindawi trial in London and subsequent British efforts to whip up joint EC sanctions against Syria. A Chirac spokesman told journalists two weeks ago, for example, that France had decided to pin most of its hopes for resolving the hostage issue on Damascus. Interior Minister Pasqua told journalists last week, moreover, that France and Syria were now working together in the fight against terrorism and that "there is now real collaboration between the Syrian and French (security) services." He also said the French government believed that no Arab country was directly implicated in the Paris bombings in September. Paris may calculate that developing international awareness of Syrian complicity in terrorism may actually play to France's advantage, because increasing Syrian isolation could prompt Damascus to attach greater importance to its friendly relations with Paris. [redacted]

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Despite its defense of normal relations with Damascus and Tehran, the French government has firmly denied making deals with terrorist groups. These denials, however, increasingly ring false. Investigative journalists for the respected daily Le Monde reported recently that Paris had used Syrian and Algerian intermediaries to arrange a truce with the Abdallah clan effective through February--by which date Georges Abdallah could

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be found not guilty of murder for lack of evidence and presumably paroled. Although Le Monde did not produce evidence to confirm its story, the normally docile Paris press has refused to swallow government denials. French officials admit to the US Embassy in Paris that they negotiated a respite from bombings, but they claim that the agreement is with Syria to bottle up LARF in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Cohabitation: The Political Context of French Counterterrorism

After six months in office, Chirac has gained control over the main levers of counterterrorism policy--although President Mitterrand almost certainly retains a de facto veto over specific measures because he can threaten to make them a political issue. Mitterrand and Chirac have observed an uneasy truce on counterterrorism issues because cohabitation is very popular with French voters and numerous polls indicate that they stand ready to punish anyone who disrupts it, especially for partisan advantage. Beyond this, however, Mitterrand and Chirac have had essentially different problems in capitalizing on the political possibilities of counterterrorism.

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Chirac's greatest problem is to convince voters that conservative policies are working. Despite a recent upswing in voter approval, we believe the jury is still out on Chirac's government: barring a catastrophe or a major success on the economic front, the public will be slow to make a definitive judgment on his term in office. Mitterrand and the Socialist opposition, of course, stand ready to capitalize on any major misstep. Chirac's gaffes about possible Israeli responsibility for the Hindawi plot had the potential to become a major row, but the release of French hostages soon thereafter will probably repair any damage to public confidence in Chirac's leadership.\*

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Over the longer term, moreover, Chirac's rivals on the right--notably former President Giscard d'Estaing and former Prime Minister Barre--are hoping to profit from his failures and to lead conservatives in their run at the Elysee in 1988. Giscard, especially, has shown an eagerness to hold Chirac's feet to the fire on counterterrorism, most recently by suggesting that

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\*Nor are Chirac's continued relations with Damascus likely to provide an opening because a majority of Frenchmen support negotiations with Damascus, even after the Hindawi affair.

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Paris should have backed London against Syria over the Hindawi plot. Other center-right luminaries of the old Giscardian confederation (UDF) have also criticized one element or another of Chirac's approach to terrorism. Recently, the malaise among conservative backbenchers has been such that Pierre Messmer--the venerable president of the Neo-Gaullist caucus in the National Assembly--demanded a clarification of Chirac's Middle East policies. [ ]

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Chirac's popularity has been volatile since he took office, and counterterrorism has played a key role. At first, tough talk played well with French voters and Chirac's popularity soared to unprecedented heights. Turning talk into effective action was difficult, however, and this hurt Chirac in polls during the summer. This, and his rise in popularity after he responded to the bombs in Paris in September, has underlined the importance to Chirac of counterterrorism in the highly-charged French political atmosphere. [ ]

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Terrorism is also a difficult issue for Mitterrand, but for different reasons. Chirac's constitutional authority over domestic security is crystal clear, and his control over foreign affairs is growing by the week despite the ambiguities in the constitution. Mitterrand has been unable to find a plausible argument for insisting that he and not the Prime Minister should conduct counterterrorism policy. Mitterrand is almost certainly continuing low-key efforts to achieve release of the hostages, probably by discreet demarches to Syrian President Assad, but the Elysee's hostage/counterterrorism effort has largely withered. Mitterrand's main hope now is that the public will begin to see Chirac's get-tough measures at home as repressive and futile and that public perceptions of the Prime Minister's willingness to accommodate terrorist sponsors abroad will undermine whatever political gain he might achieve by bringing hostages home. [ ]

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In the meantime, Mitterrand clearly is eager to show that he still matters in the French and international counterterrorist equation. International forums have provided the best opportunities to do both.

- Mitterrand seized the opportunity to advocate greater international cooperation on terrorism at the Tokyo summit, leaving Chirac to follow with a "me too."
- After the EC foreign ministers' refusal in Luxembourg to join strong UK action against Damascus, Mitterrand challenged EC governments to present evidence of Syrian

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culpability in international terrorism at the 10 November ministerial. A Chirac spokesman announced later that Mitterrand's declaration was a joint position. [REDACTED]

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Although each side is stockpiling political weapons that could be deadly, most observers expect the dynamics of cohabitation to preclude a major blow up over counterterrorism. We believe that both sides will keep a close eye on public opinion as they formulate their positions and try to decide how aggressively they can afford to bait each other. For now, Chirac has the advantages of control over policy and public support. Mitterrand is popular too, however, and his appeal would be less affected than Chirac's by a government failure in the counterterrorism field. [REDACTED]

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#### Public Opinion

Even before the Abdallah clan's September bombing campaign in Paris, the French people were preoccupied with terrorism and prepared for significant escalations. Fifty-three percent in fact believed then that international terrorism was going to get worse, 64 percent believed that France was the country worst affected by terrorist attacks, and 84 percent accepted that at least one state--Libya--was directly implicated in terrorist acts. [REDACTED]

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Mid-summer polls showed, moreover, that French voters were skeptical of Chirac's announced aim of toughening government measures against terrorists. They also indicated mixed opinions about how to deal with the hostage problem, with those polled splitting 42 to 45 percent on whether or not terrorists should be freed to obtain the release of French hostages. Voters were evenly divided as well--41 to 41 percent-- on whether Chirac was doing more than Socialist Prime Minister Fabius had done to fight terrorism--an estimation that coincided with a temporary dip in Chirac's overall job performance ratings. [REDACTED]

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The September bombings and Chirac's tough response boosted his public image substantially, but helped Mitterrand almost as much. Mitterrand's public approval rose 6 percentage points during a two-week period in October, matching the record set at the beginning of his presidency in 1981. During the same period, Chirac's popularity skyrocketed 12 points to equal his all-time high of 58 percent. Knowledgeable observers attribute much of the increases to the siege mentality that has gripped Frenchmen since the LARF bombings--a mentality that also featured a dramatic shift of opinion (85 percent) against releasing terrorists in return for hostages. [REDACTED]

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Although the recent bombings clearly influenced the attitudes of some Frenchmen toward terrorism, we believe that most of the objection was not against dealing with terrorists but against deals made under pressure. The present lull in bombings is likely to contribute to a swing back to familiar attitudes that tolerate some accommodation with terrorists. By maintaining a domestic show of force and making clandestine deals that effectively prevent a resumption of bombings, Chirac will have a good chance of deflecting charges that his toughness is a sham. If he also succeeds in obtaining the release of more hostages, he could portray his policies as a resounding success. There is always a risk that some miscalculation will expose the contradictions between the government's rhetoric and its practices, but otherwise the terrorism issue seems unlikely to damage Chirac's long-term presidential ambitions. [REDACTED]

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#### Near Term Prospects and Implications for the US

At the moment, Chirac probably believes that he can get the terrorism issue under control. Indeed, he may believe that the domestic and foreign elements of his counterterrorist policies can improve his political position significantly by as early as spring.

---If the lull in LARF bombing continues until Georges Abdallah's trial for murder and Abdallah is acquitted--as appears likely--Chirac will probably engineer a parole for the LARF leader in order to preclude further bombing.

-- Chirac may also believe that rapprochement with both Iran and Syria is likely to lead to the release of more or all French hostages by spring--an achievement that would almost certainly bolster his popularity and presidential prospects.

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-- Chirac may anticipate, moreover, that detente with Tehran and Damascus--together with modification of the UNIFIL mandate that is up for renewal in January--could remove the threat of attacks that have left more than a score of French soldiers dead or wounded.

-- If Chirac achieves all this, he will have outmaneuvered and to a considerable extent marginalized Mitterrand in the counterterrorism field, leaving the President little possibility of reclaiming preminence in foreign affairs.

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As promising as Chirac's prospects may seem, his path is not without pitfalls. If Chirac's actions alienated public opinion, Mitterrand could use the prestige of the presidency to call him to heel. And if Chirac and Raimond continued to come up emptyhanded in their dealings with Damascus and Tehran--especially in the face of mounting evidence that both are involved in terrorism--neither Socialist opponents nor disgruntled backbenchers in Chirac's own coalition would hesitate to call him to account. Chirac is almost certainly concerned, moreover, that Syria and Iran may be unable or unwilling to obtain the release of French hostages if Hizballah's demands for the Da'wa prisoners are not met. Chirac's scenario also assumes that Syrian and Iranian sponsorship of international terrorism will not be so outrageous and widely-recognized as to force him to retreat from his cultivation of closer relations with both.

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We believe the Chirac government might alter for a time its reliance on accommodation with Syria and Iran if, over a period of weeks, it had clearly failed to stop bombings in France and if both withdrew their help in securing the release of remaining French hostages. Moreover, if there were convincing evidence that Syria was directly involved in bombings within France, Paris would be forced to break off collaboration with Damascus. Without a "smoking gun," however, Chirac is likely to pursue rapprochements with Damascus and Tehran, eventually holding out attractive economic incentives and arms sales to both.

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Chirac is also likely to resist EC and Allied pressure to implement stronger measures against Damascus, even in the face of additional evidence that Syria sponsors terrorism outside of France. As part of the price for Syrian aid in freeing additional French hostages, Paris may attempt to persuade the EC partners to soften the sanctions imposed on Damascus.

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[REDACTED]

The US stake in the success or failure of Chirac's efforts is significant, both because Washington advocates different models for achieving success on the hostage issue and because the fortunes of French policy could alter the balance of forces that US efforts face in the region. Failure of Chirac's efforts at accommodation would tend to confirm longstanding US arguments that negotiations with terrorist sponsors only strengthen the hand of kidnapers and encourage further terrorism--even though recently revealed US arms deliveries to Tehran have reportedly given such claims a hollow ring in France. If, however, Chirac achieves at least some of his narrow objectives, as we believe he might, this may further diminish French determination to oppose domination of Lebanon by Syria and Islamic fundamentalists. Such an outcome would also tend to enhance the prestige of Islamic radicals whose objectives in the Middle East are contrary to the interests of the United States and moderate states in those regions. [REDACTED]

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\*Foreign Minister Raimond may have already begun this process when he characterized the sanctions as not necessarily directed at the Syrian government, but at "some Syrians" who were implicated by British evidence in the Hindawi plot. [REDACTED]

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